WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY · Founded December 17, 1857 NOV -- DEC 1980

WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

WCHS DIRECTORS ADOPT POLICY FOR COLLECTIONS

A collections policy statement drafted by Dr. John C. Dann, curator (and WCHS president), has been adopted by the WCHS Board of Directors.

The Society's main aim is to collect, preserve and display items, essentially artifactual in nature, which relate directly or indirectly to any aspect of the history of Washtenaw County as a whole. It does not aim to compete with but to complement other museums and collections in the area.

The Society will be happy to accept unrelated items of monetary value which can be disposed of at a profit to the Society if the donor is willing to donate them on that basis. The Society would reserve the right to sell any donated items if it became advisable, but only on recommendation of the curator and with Board approval.

The Society will also collect basic reference works on Michigan and Washtenaw County for a future office and "library" items with potential display value — photographs, posters, local business catalogues and a few deeds and manuscript letters.

Other library and archival resources would be donated to or placed on permanent loan with the Michigan Historical Collections (at Bentley Library) if they agree to preserve them in perpetuity because they have superior facilities to keep and make them available for research.

The policy also provides for careful cataloguing and maintaining three copies of the catalogue — one with the collection, one with the curator, and a security file in another safe location.

GIFTS FROM NEAR, FAR: SIGN, COOKBOOK, DEED, MIRROR, FRAME GIVEN

The WCHS collection benefits not only from longtime local residents gifts but also from those who are moving or have moved away.

A large wood-framed tin sign for the West Side Custom Mill of Ann Arbor topped with a "cow" was given by a Mrs. Schneider while Theodore K. Rossiter gave a gilt wall mirror, circa 1820's, and an ornate gilt picture frame of the 1860's or '70's before recent moves. The gilt items were Rossiter family heirlooms from New York state. The frame was from an ancestor of the Hudson River school of painters.

From San Leandro, California, came a *Jubilee Cookbook* put out in 1887 by a committee of the Ladies Aid Society of the Ann Arbor Methodist Episcopal Church and printed by Junius Beal. The donor was Mrs. M. Abraham.

From Mr. Beal's daughter, Loretta Beal Jacobs of Ann Arbor, came a vellum land grant dated January 31, 1835, to John Martin for 79 acres fronting on Ellsworth Road east of Golfside, now part of Washtenaw Country Club. It was signed for President Andrew Jackson by his nephew Andrew J. Donelson.

COUNTRY CHRISTMAS SET

Cobblestone Farm's "Country Christmas" will be from noon to 4 p.m. Sundays, December 7 and 14, at the farm, 2781 Packard Road. Antique dolls and toys will be on display. The Sacred Harp Singers and Recorder Society will provide music. Sleigh rides if there is snow. Decorating by a YM-YWCA group led by Virginia Tobias except the tree by Junior Girl Scouts. Cadette Girl Scouts will act as guides.

'JAZZ IN MICHIGAN' WILL BE 'REVISITED' BY WUOM'S SCHUMACHER

Whether the 1920's are nostalgic memories or "the olden days" to you, you'll get a good glimpse of at least one thing that made them "roaring" at the November WCHS meeting — jazz.

Hazen J. Schumacher, Jr., host of WUOM's Saturday evening program "Jazz Revisited" and an authority on the subject will discuss "Jazz in Michigan", especially in the 1920's, at 8 p.m. Thursday, November 20, at the Salvation Army, West Huron at Arbana.

Schumacher's less-jazzy title is U-M director of broadcasting and media resources.

WCHS PLANS CHRISTMAS PARTY AT CLEMENTS SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

The December WCHS meeting will be an encore of last year's Christmas social meeting at the U-M's Clements Library, 909 South University Avenue.

It will be from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday, December 7. Punch and cookies will be served. Parking will be allowed on one side of the street that afternoon.

Dr. John C. Dann, director of the library and WCHS president, plans a Christmas exhibit of library materials similar to last year. Incidentally, the Christmas riddle in last year's exhibit is the centerfold art in the November-December *Michigan History* magazine, published by the Michigan Department of State

JAN LONGONE TO SPEAK

Jan Longone, founder of the Ann Arbor Wine and Food Library, will speak at the January WCHS meeting on "Michigan Charity Cookbooks".

'THE MAGNIFICENT MICHIGAN'

ANN ARBOR'S LAST MOVIE PALACE

WCHS "Met The Michigan", Ann Arbor's last movie palace as well as as a real theatre with footlights and dressing rooms, at its October meeting.

The Society toured the 1,813 seat theatre which was operated for fifty years by Butterfield Theatres and managed almost that long by Gerald H. Hoag who retired in 1975. Butterfield still operates the State and Campus Theatres in Ann Arbor.

The Michigan was owned by the Poulos family until August 1979. Then the City of Ann Arbor floated bonds to purchase it. It is being run and paid for by the Michigan Community Theatre Foundation, Incorporated, a local group formed to preserve the theatre and its full-throated Barton organ.

The tour poked into various nooks and crannies of the theatre from the separate front and back basements to the projection room above the balcony, a height equal to seven floors in an ordinary building.

After the tour, tourgoers could stay for a showing of the silent film version of "The Phantom of the Opera", accompanied on the organ by Dennis James, resident organist for the Ohio Theatre in Columbus, a completely restored historic theatre.

Ray Messler, theatre manager who greeted the WCHS group, explained that the theatre is part of the Michigan Theatre Building which also includes stores and offices. It was started in 1927 and the theatre opened in January 1928.

Last year when it was for sale and the going interest rate was about 14 percent, the city was able to sell bonds for about 6½ percent, saving MCTF an estimated $63,000.

The Michigan is the third historic theatre Messler has worked to restore as a place of public entertainment. "We had four bookings in May," he said. "In September, we had 56, October 46. It looks like we'll have 59 in November and December, usually a dead month, looks like almost 60. We're moving along very rapidly."

Pictures courtesy of Henry Aldridge

This, the second marquee was in place from 1942–56 but Photographer Maitland LaMotte took this picture either October 23, 24 or 25, 1950, because that's when "Our Very Own" was showing there according to Dr. Henry Aldridge's research.

Tourgoers were then divided into two groups led by David Neal and Henry Aldridge, respectively. Neal is an actor with Young People's Theatre of the Ann Arbor Recreation Department. Dr. Aldridge, an Eastern Michigan University professor of film history who lives in Ann Arbor, has been a leader in the effort to preserve the theatre and its organ, one of the few theatre pipe organs still in its original location. (The editor was in Neal's group.)

The tour group dodged raindrops to take a closer look at the marquee and facade. The present triangular marquee, taller than the original and more completely overhanging the sidewalk, was installed in 1956 when the entire theatre was remodeled. Neal pointed out the blue and green ornamentation high on the facade beyond the marquee.

In 1948, instead of the open outer lobby with box office in the center, the doors were right at the sidewalk and the box office in the corner on the east side with a staircase directly behind it so the money could be taken directly to the manager's office. Egress from the present box office is under a low half-door opening.

Access to the theatre is through the enclosed second lobby and by the ticket taker at the entrance to the grand foyer which is mainly the same as in 1928 with its sweeping double staircase to the balcony.

The theatre was originally decorated in maize and blue. A sample of the original carpet, darkened and worn, survives. By scraping away the present battleship gray and orange of the stair railing through several layers, a layer of gold leaf was exposed. They are not sure if

this is the original layer.

Behind a curtain on the north end of the foyer was once a replica of the fountain in New York's Roxy Theater. The water pipes are still in place but the fountain itself has yet to be found. There were opera lamps on the staircase posts.

In the basement a wall of cubby-holes holds an assortment of red plastic letters in different sizes needed to spell out the attractions on the marquee. Also there is the original men's rest room, a room for ushers to change into uniform, the furnace and a built-in vacuum cleaner system with pipes to upper levels.

In the balcony lobby, Neal pointed out a wall panel painted to look like wallpaper and likely spots on the ceiling where chandeliers could have hung. People have claimed to have proof both that there were and there weren't, Neal said. (Hoag says there weren't.)

Neal said the first row balcony seats on the south side are considered best in the house because one can see the organist's hands and feet and dancers' feet on stage. Front row occupants on the main floor can see only the footlights.

More comfortable padded seats were added in 1956. The Foundation is uncertain if it wants to change back to the earlier hard seats. Neal noted the hard, shiny sounding board at the back of the balcony and the five grills on either side wall toward the stage. The first three on either side are organ grills, the other two, air vents.

Fake doors designed for aesthetic balance near real exit doors had to be removed because of fire safety regulations.

The projection room has five projectors. Two 1928 models are in working condition but not often used. Two Xenon projectors can hold 60 minute and 20 minute reels. A 20 minute reel is 6,000 feet long, Neal said.

The fifth projector is a double-headed Brenograph for special effects. The two heads simultaneously project different things. For a singalong, one head has the words, the other the "bouncing ball".

Soon after the Michigan opened in 1928 talkies ended the need for theatre organs but the Michigan's still survives due in part to the efforts of Dr. Aldridge (above).

An electric changeover system signals the projectionist to get ready to change reels. A re-winder rewinds the reels. Small "stove" pipes to the ceiling vent heat from the projector lamps. They also vented gases when carbon arc lamps were used.

Two women projectionists happened to be on duty that evening, Liz Moray and Glenda Pittman. They are members of the "rather revolutionary" Ann Arbor local of the theatrical and stage employees union which has admitted five women members. The Detroit local has refused for many years to admit women, they said.

Next, it was down the back stairs to the stage. The stage opening is 35 feet wide, 22 feet high and 29 feet deep. Rows of weighted ropes dangle from the several curtains. The large original light control board sits stage right. The original screen was used until five years ago. A back door leads to the alley by the bank.

Near the back door is a small board that told rehearsal times, dressing room assignments, performance reporting times and when the train and cleaners would arrive. There are seven dressing rooms and six others for use of actors and musicians including a make-up room, a lounge where band members could relax before going upstairs to the "pit", and an artist's room. The artist used to draw pictures of various attractions.

Only a young child would not have to duck under the overhanging stage to enter the orchestra pit. Here one can peak over the edge of the stage and feel the heat of the footlights.

To the left of the pit sits the Barton organ. It has three positions—a high prominent one for organ concerts, an in-between one when played during a silent film, for example, or it can be lowered to a resting position. It has three keyboards and several special foot pedals for special sounds — fire engine siren, steamboat whistle, auto horn. It can produce almost any sound desired, Neal said.

(The "sister" Michigan Theatre in Jackson, visited on the WCHS June tour, opened two years later and has no organ because talkies came in a few months before. The two theatres were designed by the same architect, Maurice Finkel. The Jackson theatre still has its original more ornate style and original paint colors and is being restored by a community group.)

Looking at the back of the theatre from the pit, Neal noted that two rows of seats in the center section were lost when the popcorn and refreshment stand was moved to the present location from the southeast corner of the foyer.

The tour concluded, tourgoers could climb over the pit railing or duck back under the stage.

GSWC MEETING PLANNED

Genealogy Society of Washtenaw County will have a combined November-December meeting at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, December 7, at Washtenaw Community College. The program is a question and answer period. Class at 1 p.m.

UNPAID DUES? SORRY, NO MORE *IMPRESSIONS*

This is the last issue of *Washtenaw Impressions* we can send to you if your dues are not paid, except for a limited number of goodwill and publicity copies sent to historical groups, libraries and media.

You should be receiving a dues letter right about now. To continue receiving this newsletter and support the Society's efforts to preserve the county's heritage please send your dues today. Dues paid now will cover all of 1981.

If you have questions please contact Mary Steffek Blaske, membership chairman, at (home) 665-5964, (office) 769-1828 or by mail, 820 Third Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103.

NON-DRIVING MEMBERS NEED RIDE TO MEETINGS

Some interested WCHS members don't drive or don't drive at night but would like to come to meetings if they had a ride. Would anyone willing to pick up a passenger or two call Alice Ziegler, 663-8826, and we'll try to match you up with someone not too far away. Thanks.

COOKIES PLEASE

A variety of cookies will make the December meeting more festive so will you please bake and donate some of your family's favorites? If so, please call Donna Miller, refreshments chairman, 663-9347.

HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

Chelsea Historical Society — Meets at 7:30 p.m. second Monday of month at McKune Memorial Library, 221 South Main Street. Election of officers in November, no meeting in December.

Dexter Historical Society — Annual Christmas bazaar, 10 a.m.--4 p.m., Saturday, December 6, at museum, 3443 Inverness. Homemade items, baked goods for sale. Children may have picture taken with Santa Claus. Special toy display around tree decorated with handmade ornaments.

"Fat Bob" Taylor will lead the annual Christmas sing on the museum grounds at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, December 20. The museum will then close for the winter. Singers advised to dress warm and bring a flashlight to read music. Hot mulled cider, coffee and cookies will be served.

Manchester Historical Society — 8 p.m. Monday, November 24, at Emanuel Church.

Milan Historical Society — 7:30 p.m. third Wednesday of month at Hack House, 775 County Street.

Saline Historical Society — President Alice Byrne and her husband, Brian, plan a Christmas open house at their 1863 Greek Revival home at 6200 Saline-Ann Arbor Road, probably Sunday afternoon, December 14. Readers welcome if they call ahead, 429-7661. Visitors may tour home which has barn beam construction, meet former residents. She also hopes to have a folk art workshop to make such things as pine cone angels and teasel owls to take home.

Audrey Barkel, fourth grade teacher in Saline, is to speak at 2 p.m. Sunday, November 16, in Senior Citizen's Room at City Services Building on Maple Road (formerly Uniloy) about Saline's Curtis mansion and grounds, also about her local history curriculum and annual walking tour of Saline for her students.

Ypsilanti Historical Society — Christmas open house 3--5 p.m. Sunday, December 14, at museum, 220 North Huron. Cookies, punch and caroling. All welcome.

Annual meeting Sunday, January 18, at museum. Museum special exhibit through November is campaign memorabilia from Douglas Kelley of U-M Adult and Continuing Education Department.

MANCHESTER OFFICERS

Howard R. Parr was re-elected president of the Manchester Historical Society for 1980-81. Frances Nathan is first vice-president; Elizabeth Grossman, second vice-president; Hazel Kappler, secretary; and Dorothy Mann, treasurer. New trustees are Tom Walton and Dorothy Hamilton.

Editor: Alice Ziegler, 663-8826
Keylining: Anna Thorsch

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

8 P. M. THURSDAY NOVEMBER 20, 1980

SALVATION ARMY

West Huron at Arbana Ann Arbor, Michigan

Foster Fletcher
4980 West Michigan Avenue
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197

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